



Belly Breathing

Stress affects us all and chronic stress affects the immune system, the adrenals and even the heart. How we react to stress is often more of a predictor of health risks than the event itself and learning to manage stress positively will, in turn, impact positively on our health.

Often we try to manage stress using alcohol, tobacco or food but this in turn, results in a downward spiral as our health suffers.

Managing stress with exercise, meditation, belly breathing, improving time management, healthy diet, and improving the quality of the important relationships in your life will turn the spiral around.

When we are stressed we tend to shallow breathe and this leads to more tension and fatigue. Breathing with your diaphragm reduces stress and improves energy.

- *Abdominal breathing*, also known as *diaphragmatic breathing*, decreases stress by activating relaxation centers in the brain. The abdominal expansion causes a vacuum to pull blood into the chest, improving the venous flow of blood back to the heart and on to the lungs for oxygenation.

Either sit or lie with feet and legs slightly apart. Place one hand on your belly, over your navel and the other hand on your chest.

Close your eyes and gently exhale to the count of 8. Pull your belly in as you exhale. Gently push all the air out your lungs through your mouth.

Then to the count of 4, inhale through your nose, pushing your belly out slightly as the air flows in.

Hold that breath for the count of 4.

Slowly exhale again through your mouth to the count of 8.

Repeat several times.

You may feel a bit light-headed initially. Gradually increase these cycles until you can belly breathe for a few minutes.

Repeat several times a day. This can be done at your desk or even in the bathroom.

Breathe gently and quietly.

- *Meditation or quiet time.* Schedule in 5-15 minutes every day when you sit in silence and just breathe. If it helps, cover your eyes and plug your ears. Allow your mind to flow over all the things in your life that you can be grateful for.
- *Exercise.* Regular exercise is very beneficial for stress management. Exercise improves sleep and increases energy which will assist in coping with stressful events.
- *A healthy diet.* The minerals and vitamins that come with a healthy diet are essential for adrenal support, as well as energy generation. Cut out sugar. Sugar is detrimental to your immune system, as is alcohol and caffeine.
- *Plan your time.* It is worth doing a course on time management if this is an area in life you struggle with. Sometimes the simplest techniques make a huge difference. Managing time will also free you up to spend leisure time with your loved ones, or time for hobbies that bring you joy.